

Message Text

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ACTION SCSE-00

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R 221954Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9102

UNCLAS PORT OF SPAIN 1000

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: CDES, TD (HODGES, CHINA)

SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION INTO DEATH OF CHINA HODGES

REF: STATE 097095

1. INITIAL CORONER'S INQUEST IN HODGES CASE HELD MARCH 8, SUBSEQUENT HEARINGS HELD MARCH 12, MARCH 19, APRIL 2, AND APRIL 6. ALL TESTIMONY HAS NOW BEEN TAKEN AND CORONER HAS SCHEDULED FINAL SESSION FOR APRIL 23, ON WHICH DATE CORONER'S RULING WILL BE GIVEN. MULTIPLE SESSIONS HAVE BEEN REQUIRED IN ORDER TO HEAR ALL PERTINENT WITNESSES AND OBTAIN RESULTS OF DETAILED MEDICAL TESTS. SINCE INITIAL PATHOLOGICAL TESTS WERE INCONCLUSIVE, ADDITIONAL TESTS ON DECEASED'S BLOOD WERE CONDUCTED BY LABORATORY OF UNIVERSITY OF WEST INDIES MEDICAL SCHOOL IN JAMAICA.

2. CONSUL HAS ATTENDED EACH SESSION OF CORONER'S INQUEST AND HAS ALSO BEEN IN INDEPENDENT TOUCH WITH MEDICAL EXAMINER AND POLICE OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN INVESTIGATION. EMBASSY IS IMPRESSED WITH THOROUGHNESS AND PROFESSIONALISM OF INVESTIGATION AND INQUEST PROCEEDINGS. WHILE FAMILY'S CONCERN AT DELAY IN OBTAINING FINAL VERDICT IS UNDERSTANDABLE, THE DELAY HAS BEEN DUE TO THE VERY THOROUGHNESS WHICH EMBASSY BELIEVES FAMILY WOULD INDEED WISH IN A CASE WHICH HAD PUZZLING ASPECTS.

3. CONSUL HAS BEEN IN REGULAR DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH DECEASED'S MOTHER AT EACH STAGE OF CORONER'S INQUEST, BY UNCLASSIFIED

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TELEGRAMS DATED FEBRUARY 24 AND MARCH 9, AND BY LETTERS ON

MARCH 18, APRIL 1, AND APRIL 6.

4. IN COMMUNICATIONS WITH DECEASED'S MOTHER, EMBASSY HAS AVOIDED SPECULATING ON CAUSE OF DEATH OR DWELLING ON SENSATIONALIST ASPECTS OF SOME TESTIMONY, BELIEVING IT BEST TO WAIT FOR FINAL VERDICT. FAMILY MAY BE INFORMED, HOWEVER, THAT INVESTIGATION HAS UNCOVERED NO RPT NO SUGGESTION OR EVIDENCE OF FOUL PLAY. DIFFICULTY FACED BY CORONER WAS COMPOUNDED BY FACT THAT NONE OF EXTENSIVE MEDICAL TESTS POINTED CONCLUSIVELY TO CAUSE OF DEATH.

5. ON BASIS OF EVIDENCE HEARD, IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE A RULING OF ACCIDENTAL DEATH, PROBABLY DUE TO ASPHYXIATION FROM A POORLY INSTALLED WATER HEATER IN THE BATHROOM WHERE DEATH OCCURRED, EFFECTS OF WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN COMPOUNDED BY EFFECTS OF ALCOLOL. THIS SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED DEFINITIVE, HOWEVER, UNTIL CORONER'S REPORT ISSUED APRIL 23.

6. IN WORDS OF THE CORONER AND PATHOLOGIST, THIS HAS BEEN A VERY DIFFICULT CASE. ALL POSSIBLE TESTS AND TESTIMONY WERE SOUGHT AND INTRODUCED INTO

EVIDENCE. OFFICIAL DECISION WILL BE RENDERED ONLY AFTER CORONER HAS EXAMINED ALL THE EVIDENCE OBTAINED AT THE INQUEST HEARINGS. EMBASSY WILL INFORM THE MOTHER OF THE DECEASED IMMEDIATELY AS SOON AS DEFINITIVE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE.

7. SENATOR PERCY INTERESTED.
RICH

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